1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
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in the study of these historical cultures is equally barred. Very few historical records exist, and they are hardly informative from the sociological point of view. The people of Nupe have not yet risen to the stage of education producing written records and accounts of important events or institutions. With the exception of a few educated Mohammedan scholars whose co-operation I was able to enlist in the recording of folklore and historical traditions, I have been unable to use a single literate informant, for example, to keep diaries of important events, or to handle questionnaires. Lastly, the most essential evidence in the study of complex societies, namely statistics, scarcely exists. The statistics in this book were, with few exceptions, compiled single-handed and on a scale of the inadequacy of which no one can be more aware than the author.

I have described elsewhere the technique of inquiry which I applied, and need say nothing on that point here.[1] But it is necessary to describe the general plan of research I pursued, for it illustrates the methods by which I attempted to circumvent some of the difficulties just mentioned. I spent two years in the field, in the course of two expeditions in 1934 and 1935–6. From the outset I was confronted with the problem how to cover, in intensive study, the vast area inhabited by the Nupe people. The political configuration forbade the selection of one section to the disregard of others. The widespread political system had clearly to be studied at different points, in its centre as well as on its periphery. Moreover, a short preliminary survey already revealed the existence of considerable cultural differences within the tribe. The further my studies proceeded the more manifest became the significance of these differences as variations of a common pattern, the study of which was essential to the understanding of the forces that moulded the culture of the people. The investigation thus became perforce a comparative study within the framework of one tribe and one culture. At a certain stage of my investigation I even had to go outside this framework and devote some study to neighbouring groups—the Kakanda, Gbari, and Bassa—which, closely akin to the Nupe and partly their fellow citizens in the Nupe kingdom, might throw light on certain aspects of Nupe culture.

The main problem was to discover representative sections and centres for the study of this widely spread social system and its varying culture. I will not speak of the difficulties which I encountered in this task, helped as I was only by records and information which soon proved superficial and inexact. In the first six or seven months I was reduced almost to the method of trial and error: a very short stay in a new place would have been useless even merely to discover whether or not this place might prove a useful centre; and once I decided on a long stay the time was gone and could not be recovered even if the place turned out to be less profitable than I had expected. Let me admit that this did indeed happen in two villages (Mokwa and Sakpe) which I had made my centres upon the advice of various informants and which, as I discovered later, were not as significant or essential as certain other places would have been. However, certain general facts about the culture and the

[1] See 'The Interview Technique in Social Anthropology', in *The Study of Society*, chapter xiii, 1939.